

Our sighting is the first record of these two species in the Banaskantha district of North Gujarat. The only other sighting of both the species was in the central part of Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 1999).

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JUSTUS JOSHUA
HIREN SONI
NISCHAL M. JOSHI
PANKAJ N. JOSHI

S.V. SUBBA RAO¹
Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology,
Post Box: 83, Opp. Changleshwar Temple,
Mundra Road, Bhuj-Kachchh,
Gujarat 370 001, India.

¹Present Address: Shri Krishna Nilayam,
Lecturer's Colony, Madhura Nagar,
Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh 520 011, India.

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12. OCCURRENCE OF DESERT WHEATEAR *OENANTHE DESERTI* AND ISABELLINE WHEATEAR *OENANTHE ISABELLINA* IN MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

On January 14, 2003 we visited Palmakole Tank (17° 9' N, 78° 19' E; 30 km on National Highway 7, Hyderabad-Bangalore), Mahbubnagar district, Andhra Pradesh, for the Asian Waterfowl Census. The water level was very low. In fact, the tank was so shallow that villagers were walking right across it, fishing along the way. Agriculture (pulses, greens, vegetables, etc.) was carried out on the north, east and southeast margins of the tank, above the high water mark. There was a masonry bund on the west and a large industrial unit (Saint-Gobain Vetrotex) in the south-west. The strip of land between cultivation and the high water level had the occasional borrow-pit and was generally barren and stony, the ground being dotted with grit and boulders of all sizes, some of which were being chipped and taken away by stone-masons (illegally?), with dusty stretches of dry coarse grass in between. From where the water had recently receded, the earth was covered with close-cropped green grass. Wherever turned, the soil was revealed as black cotton.

While walking towards the water's edge, we spotted a bird on a rock, less than a metre above the ground. It was perched bolt upright, looking in our direction. Its most prominent feature was a black loreal streak that joined the black beak with the eye. It was about sparrow-sized with much longer, black legs. The rest of the body appeared a light buff colour, at a distance. When it relaxed, the tail bobbed up and down like a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Linnaeus, 1758. As we watched, it jumped to the ground and ran quickly and directly up to an insect that it picked up and ate. We

suspected that it was an Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (Temminck, 1829), after looking up Krys Kazmierczak's FIELD GUIDE (2000), but were not sure, as that work did not show the loreal streak prominently enough. However, a diagram of the bird was made on the spot. We lost sight of this bird but then spotted another unfamiliar species for these areas, not far away, upon another rock. This was unquestionably, a male Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (Temminck, 1825) (Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Jonsson 1996; Lewington *et al.*).

In the meantime, we spotted the suspected Isabelline Wheatear once again and drew another quick field sketch. Further notes were taken. A white supercilium was clearly visible over the loreal streak, ending just beyond the eye. The crown, nape, mantle and folded wings were a light sandy brown. The sides of the head (ear coverts) were pinkish-buff, as were the breast and a thin area along the flanks. The throat and abdomen were dirty white. In flight, which was generally close to the ground and straight, a broad black terminal band on the tail contrasted strongly with white upper tail feathers. The bird, when alert, stood very upright, as already noted. For a short while, the Isabelline gave vent to a thin warble-like song, which was heard by both of us. Both the Desert Wheatear and the Isabelline Wheatear frequently fed close to each other.

We visited the area again on January 19, 2003, and saw and photographed both the species. Copies of the pictures were emailed to Bill Harvey, Krys Kazmierczak and Sudhir

Vyas, who confirmed our identification by email.

Ali and Ripley (2001) give the distribution of the Desert Wheatear as, "...India east to Bihar and south to Maharashtra, eastern Tamil Nadu... and Sri Lanka..." Ali and Whistler's (1933) [Pp. 382, "*Oenanthe deserti atrogularis* (Blyth)" = *O. d. deserti* (Temminck 1825)] is the only record of the Desert Wheatear from present day Andhra Pradesh. In that paper Ali and Whistler inform (Pp. 382) "several Wheatears were observed along the route from Nirmal to Utnoor (via Talâmadri village) between October 12 and 15 [1925]. I did not, however, come across this bird anywhere within the State [erstwhile Hyderabad State] in the course of the present Survey." However, in his unpublished notebooks (photocopy of manuscript held by senior author), Ali states after the above note, "... (Note from old diary - doubtful!?)". Neelakantan, Sashikumar and Venugopalan (1993) reported sightings from Kerala, "...a female in January 1988 at Tenari (Elappully, Palghat Dt.) and a single female 'in the next two winters' and 2 females in 'the winter of 1990-91.'...a Desert Wheatear at Madayippara (Cannanore Dt.) on 17th August, '88." Surprisingly, this species is not even mentioned in the "Revised and Enlarged" edition of Ali's THE BIRDS OF KERALA (1999). The present sighting of the species is another instance of its occurrence outside its known wintering range.

Ali and Ripley (2001) record the distribution of the Isabelline Wheatear as, ".... the plains of northwestern India including N. Gujarat..., straggling east and southeast to

Varanasi and Sehore, and south to Ahmednagar... and Pune...Possibly a vagrant in Nepal... Recorded in Maldive Islands in November..." Lainer (1999) gives it the status of "Vagrant," for Goa, informing of "four sightings of up to 5 birds on a barren lateritic plateau near the coast, at Sancoale (Marmagoa), in November-December of three consecutive years in the mid-eighties." Robson (2000) records a single specimen on February 9-10, 2000 at Baga Fields, Goa. In view of these records, the present observation is a considerable extension of range for this species.

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AASHEESH PITTIE

8-2-545 Road No. 7,
Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500 034,
Andhra Pradesh, India.
Email: aasheesh.pittie@gmail.com

M. SHAFAT ULLA

H. No. 4, Street No. 1,
Avenue No. 8, Banjara Hills,
Hyderabad 500 034,
Andhra Pradesh, India.

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13. NEW RECORDS OF BIRDS IN PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE, THEKKADY, KERALA

Periyar Tiger Reserve, a well known wildlife sanctuary in India, is situated in the Cardamom and Pandalam hills of the southern Western Ghats between 9° 15'-9° 40' N and 76° 55'-77° 25' E, covering an area of 777 sq. km. Robertson and Jackson (1992) recorded 266 bird species and Srivastava *et al.* (1993) recorded 249 species in Periyar Tiger Reserve.

Santharam (1996) added three species and the existing records indicate the presence of about 314 species of birds in Periyar Tiger Reserve.

An ornithological survey was carried out in the Periyar Tiger Reserve during February 2002. Four new bird species were sighted during the survey, namely Common Greenshank